JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ROBERT C. WEBER

R
977.32
W388o

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

MF

R
977.32
W388o

This manuscript is hereby made available for research in accordance with the conditions set forth in the Interviewee Agreement. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publications, are reserved to Joliet Junior College. Persons wishing to quote any part of this manuscript must obtain written permission from the Director of the College Learning Resource Center.

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

This manuscript numbering pages is a transcript of one or more tape-recorded interviews with me. Any reader should bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of my spoken rather than my written word.

It is understood that the Joliet Junior College Learning Resource Center will allow others to read and utilize this manuscript and/or the tapes from time to time in connection with the educational purposes of the College and in accordance with the usual standards of the Learning Resource Center.

I hereby give and grant to Joliet Junior College as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the College shall determine the full use of this information.

Understood and agreed to

Interviewers	Interviewee
Rodney Westerfield (signature)	Robert C Weber (signature)
(signature)	R #3 (address)
(signature)	Lockport, Ill (city & state)
Mar. 2, 1976 (date)	Mar 2, 1976 (date)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

As a Youth on the Farm ---------- 5

We Enter the Trucking Business ---------- 6

Grandfathers' Backgrounds ---------- 7

Cattle Raising ---------- 8

The Phosphate Business ---------- 9

Inflation Brings Demise of Small Family Farms ---------- 9

Big Acreage, Big Machinery ---------- 10

Plant and Plow -- Spray and Harvest ---------- 13

How Weber Road Was Named ---------- 14

Electronic Devices for Monitoring Machinery ---------- 16

The Trend Toward Bigness ---------- 20

The Cost of "Outfitting" a Farm ---------- 22

Improvement Through Experimentation ---------- 23

The Young Farmer's Short Course ---------- 25

Crop Rotation: Corn, Beans and Florida ---------- 27

Soil Conservation ---------- 28

Problems from Land Features ---------- 30

Overbuying Equipment Makes Future Antiques ---------- 33

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2020 with funding from
Joliet Junior College Library

https://archive.org/details/weberrobertc00joli

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Robert Weber

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Rodney Westerfield

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Mr. Robert Weber for the Oral History Program by Rod Westerfield at a farm on Weber Road on March 2, 1976, at three o'clock.

WESTERFIELD: The first question would be: What was your youth like on a farm?

WEBER: Well, my youth on a farm was -- my father had got hurt when I was seven years old. And, of course, we had to quit farming -- had a sale -- my father did, but then after, when I got to be eleven years old and my brother was sixteen, why we started farmin' for ourselves. And, of course, it was a little bit tough going because we were both in school. We would have to try to do our farmwork at night. And so we would go out and do our plowing and one would plow and the other would study his lessons in the car for a certain length of time. And then we'd change off and it was a little bit tough for a while, but as we got used to it, why it went along real good and, of course, we always had a father. He was more or less a supervisor for us; but, of course, we had started farmin', and then we decided that we would have to start getting some livestock and so we started milking cows. We would buy the calves from my uncle. He was a very large dairyman and we raised our own herd by buying calves from him and raising them. And, of course, we milked by hand, and it was

real hard, but we never milked too many. We used to milk around seventeen, eighteen head and the way it turned out, my dad was a very good dairyman and supervisor; and, of course, we had real good cows. And the only hard part of it was that it was twice a day, seven days a week, and always all done by hand. We had no automatic milking machine at the time. And pretty soon why I, of course, went to grade school, and later I went to high school, too, and I would have to come home right after school to help and do the farm work, and also milk the cows. I mean my main job was to get the cows in and do the chores so that when my brother come out of the field, we'd start milking. Of course, it didn't take us too long to milk -- perhaps three-quarters of an hour is all it took us. We bought a truck and we started in the truckin' business, enlarging our operation not from the farming point, but I mean from the trucking operation along with the farming, why we kept very busy. Well then, along came the World War II. Well, I went ahead and enlisted in the Army and my brother, he kept on farmin' and would get hired help, but he never had too much luck with the hired help, due to the fact that the large ammunition plants out in Joliet was paying more wages than we could afford. /Laughter/ So, that was the end of the hired man. My brother saw it wasn't going to work that way, and we already had a pretty good business built up in truckin', so he sold the herd of cows.

WESTERFIELD: Well, the next question I really had in mind, was like do you remember your grandfather or father talking

about any of the older ways in which they farmed? Like using horses, etc.?

WEBER: No. As far as my grandfathers, my paternal grandfather, why I knew him, but he had come over from Germany, and of course, by the time that I could remember him, why my uncle, he used to live with him and they used to farm, but grandfather was getting along in years. He had worked in the steel mill for quite a few years, but he never did much farming.

WESTERFIELD: So then mainly it was just that he was mainly a farmer? Then really the farming was your father who started it?

WEBER: Yes, that's right. And my maternal grandfather, well he had come from Germany, too, but he never farmed; he worked in Joliet. He was a custodian of a church. Do you want the name of the church?

WESTERFIELD: Well, go ahead if you want to. That's no problem.

WEBER: Well, I won't mention it cause, but like I said he was custodian of the church and also he was sexton of the cemetery. He had to dig the graves. He used to get, I remember, getting $37 that's all he got to dig a grave. Frozen ground -- sometimes it would be 2 foot thick, and he would have to chip through it and get it, where today they go out with an automatic machine and -- automated machine I should say -- and they dig the grave in a couple

of hours where it used to take him sometimes as long as 18 hours to dig a grave.

WESTERFIELD: Well, another one is, what is the size of your farm here? What are the major crops that your grow on it?

WEBER: Well, our farm contains 160 acres, and since I came home from the war, I started taking over the farm more or less and have been raising corn, oats and hay, and some soybeans. My brother was getting involved with trucking more so, and so we had two trucks for a while and we always seemed to have too many irons in the fire. [Laughter] We would have to work half of the night sometimes to get our farming done and also keep the trucks running; and, of course, I never did go back to milking cows. I started feeding, fattening cattle, buying feeders when they were approximately 400 to 500 pounds and I would feed them for, oh, from 6 to 8 months, depending upon the size and what the market was doing that we along the end of April or the first part of May somewhere in there we'd always like to clear out, sell out our cattle so we wouldn't have so much chores to do while we were doing field work.

WESTERFIELD: So then what is the size, how many acres is your farm covering? Just as a generalization here?

WEBER: Well, now, of course, as we went along, our operation

changed a lot and --- we got into, in '49, raw rock phosphate business. Well, that went along kind of good for about 15 years. Then the demand died out for rock phosphate as a source of phosphorus. The tenent farmer didn't want it anymore because they was getting where you'd only get a one-year lease on the farm, see, and a rock phosphate program you had to figure at 5 years. So anyway they got away from rock phosphate; and, of course, we discontinued our business in Joliet, Illinois, and, well, then, of course, my brother,and I, we both got married and started having a family and I have a son that now he's married and he works with me. My brother, he has gotten away from the farming end of it. I guess we didn't do things just right because we both had heart attacks and-- so we can't do as much work as we like to do anymore. Like my son Charles, while he does most of the heavy work and is kind of taking over the managing end of the farm now, I'm more or less -- I just helping him do what I can. I can't do a lot of heavy work.

WESTERFIELD: There have been, I don't know, lately there's been many changes in farming equipment. What are your feelings on this-- the trend of like, for example, more bigger tractors? I know for a fact the big 4-wheel drive tractors. . . .

WEBER: There has been a terrific change in farming in the last 10 years, due to inflation and cost of things going

up. My father had owned this farm until his death in 1970, and we couldn't get enough earnings living off of 160 acres, so we had to start renting more ground, my son and I did. And at the present time we're operating about 700 acres of crop land which is planted mostly to corn and soybeans, and we have a small acreage of wheat-- approximately 40 acres of wheat. But anyway this farming operation today is, I'm not speaking of our own, I'm speaking of everybody's in general, you have to farm a lot of acres so you buy a tractor which today may cost you the average size 100-horsepower tractor will cost you list price $21,000--- in that area. Also, the combine will cost you on up to 40- to $50,000 today depending upon size and accessories and stuff like that. But anyway, back to the farming conditions, when we bought this big tractor and it's a 125-horsepower tractor, but it looks like now we don't have enough acres to utilize it, so we're going to have to rent some more acres. That's the general trend of the farming. The different fellows I mean, they buy a big tractor, then they go rent some more acres-- well then, the tractor is too small so they have to buy a bigger tractor; and pretty soon they'd gotten up to where they're using 4-wheel tractors, which is costing in the area of $35,000. And, of course, they're working thousands of acres. They're pulling 2 corn planters together, either an 8-row or 12-row, 30-inch and, of course, they have to have a bigger combine, too, so they go to town and they buy the biggest one they can buy; and I've heard of one

fellow-- he bought a combine and he operates a thousand acres and so he thought he'd buy a combine that he could do his own thousand acres of harvesting and also do some outside work. So he acquired, purchased, this combine with a 20-foot grain head on it, and an 8-row, wide-row corn head and an 8-row, narrow-row corn head. And he's got $61,000 plus sales tax involved in that particular combine.

WESTERFIELD: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. Also on your combine you have the cost of your different heads for your different crops.

WEBER: That's right.

WESTERFIELD: Like you say, you raise wheat, which means you have to have a special grain head.

WEBER: As these combines today they are very modern and it's only a matter of 15 to 20 minutes and you can change from say the grain head to the corn head if it comes up a rain, you want to, your've been combining soybeans, then you want to go out and do some corn then cause the soybeans got wet so it takes about 20 minutes to change from the grain head to the row-type machine, a row-type head. Inflation has taken a pretty good hold here within the last 3 years, and the government has made some deals to the other countries exporting grains. And we have to produce more now because we're trying to supply the world and also

our own. I mean it used to be back here that the government had a program that when we wasn't exporting so much, the government controlled our acreage. We were only allowed to plant say so many acres of corn, so many acres of wheat, and any grain that came under the Feed Grain Act. But, of course, wheat has never been a real major crop in this area like it has in the southwestern central states. This government program was discontinued in 1973, so there was no program in '74. We were allowed to grow as many acres, all the acres, that we could; but the government program is still kept up for certain types of farming, not to control surplus, but it's more or less a conservation program to help protect some of this soil from wind erosion and water erosion which you do have a lot of trouble with when you're raising all row crops. Of course, the government program is still in effect. To keep up the history of producing acres on all farms, we would have to go back under that program, and so that's why they're keeping up our acreage allotments. So perhaps, like in our situation here-- we have 160 acres-- my brother and I own that now. My father passed away, but I think our allotment is 52 acres of a 160-acre farm, see.

WESTERFIELD: That's quite a cut!

WEBER: Our yield is up to 119 bushels to the acre. Of course, everybody's yield is going up today with these improved hybrids and fertilizers, which are getting more

plentiful, or I shouldn't say more plentiful, but the farmers didn't use them as much as they are now. And herbicides are coming into the farming situation, pretty strong. Where you can almost plant a crop and put some of the herbicides on and eliminate the weeds entirely, entirely, providing the weather works with you the right way, see. There's places where fellows have planted corn, some of these fellows working thousands, a thousand acres alone, why they'll have these herbicides spread and won't have to cultivate the field at all. I mean you just plant and plow and spray and harvest.

WESTERFIELD: Do you recall any time in your, like when you're farming, you've had a bad year with the weather, like, and erosion. . . ?

WEBER: Well, yes, we were farming -- I think I'm getting a way ahead of my story, though. Brother and I started farming here in 1930. And, well, and then we had the drought years in '33 and '34; and chinch bugs, which is insects, took our crops, and it was so dry that we couldn't hardly raise very little. In fact, I went out with my brother. He picked the corn by hand due to the fact that he was considerably older, and sometimes like on Saturdays, if I was helpin' him, why we'd get on and ride from one few little cornstalks to the next few.

WESTERFIELD: It was that bad!

WEBER: Yes, but, we weathered all these things. We got by. Nobody had very much money, but you raised your gardens and stuff. My maternal grandfather was very good at making garden, so we raised pretty near everything that we ate then including our own meat and we had a few pigs. We'd butcher a couple a year. And our beef -- that was the same way -- we'd raise that, too, but, like I said before, we -- it was tough goin', but it's all gone now. More water over the dam is what it amounts to. /Chuckle/ But now we're having this inflation where it takes really a good bookkeeper on a farm today cause if you don't watch yourself, you'll get more invested in the crop than you're going to get out of it, especially if you would get a dry year. Like last year, everybody had a pretty good crop except in the small area where I live we had a dry part of the season; and the first part of August, when the corn is earing out, why we were kinda on the dry side; and if we'd have had, say, an inch of rain the first week in August, I think we'd have had another ten, fifteen bushels of corn to the acre and, also, perhaps another five bushels of soybeans.

WESTERFIELD: I noticed that the road out here in front of you is Weber Road. Is this named after any relation of yours?

WEBER: Yes, this road was named for my father due to the fact that the Chicago District Pipeline put a gas line by

this farm here in 1931. And, of course, it was dug with a machine six to nine foot deep and four feet wide; and, of course, machinery them days were not as reliable as they are today and sometimes a digger would be broke down more than it was runnin'. Anyway when they got to diggin' by our farm, the construction men at the time were mostly local men out of Joliet and my father and mother had lived in Joliet and they knew them for some time. Anyway they knew a lot of the fellows working on it; and well, when they'd break down, [Laughter] why they would leave the poor operator work on it and they would come into the house and sit here and drink coffee, and mother would make sandwiches for them when they were really going good on the digger and so then they just called it Weber Road. That's how; and, of course, then when Coca-Cola plant started in at the intersection of this road, Route 30 and --Theodore Street, why Coca-Cola plant took the Weber Road as their address and that's how it kind of established the name. Really there was no. . . .

WESTERFIELD: Written document?

WEBER: Ceremony, or anything like that, but. . . .

WESTERFIELD: It just kind of stuck.

WEBER: It just kind of stuck with us, I mean. I didn't tell you that but this house that I live in, I was born in it. You see my father bought the farm in 1913; and, of course,

I have a brother and a sister. We all were born right at home. People didn't go to hospitals for having children so much then, in those days.

WESTERFIELD: Another thing that I was told, the electronical devices lately, I know there's been a lot of use of monitors and different things-- Have these devices in your opinion helped the farm?

WEBER: Oh, definitely. I have a corn planter that I bought here 4 years ago. And it's a new style planter. It does not have a plate for individual rows to regulate the amount of seed going through it. And it has a --- blower that operates with 7 to 10 ounces of our PSI that blows the seed. Well, this seed falls-- it's in a big tank that holds 11 bushels of seed, and there's a small pipe which lets this corn run into the drum. And this drum is the one that decides how many kernels to be planted. It has holes in it with air pressure; and, naturally, when a kernel of corn falls over that hole, why it would stay there because it shuts off the air pressure, you see, and then this drum keeps turning continuously at certain speeds, depending upon the population that you want. Then when this drum gets up to the top, or I should say on top of this drum is 6 rubber tire wheels that run over these holes in this drum. Well, that automatically lets the kernels fall into what you call a manifold system. This manifold is hooked up to 6 tubes. I have a 6-row, narrow-row planter. And it blows the corn right over in--- to the

ground. Well, when they first started the planter, why--we had some troubles which you always expect from something new, but the company seems to have got them all ironed out. And I guess the planter has really been a success because people are buyin' them as fast as they can make them today.

WESTERFIELD: This planter you're talking about is the cycle planter by International?

WEBER: Yes. It's a 400 Cyclo-planter. It's made by the International Harvester Company. The first one that I bought, or I should say the one that I bought first, was the first planter in Will County. In fact the dealer didn't even know what the price of it was. We kind of worked out some deal between us and I had the planter but I think the planter actually cost about twice as much as the dealer figured it was going to cost [Laughter], cause let's see, planters sell in the-- some of the farm papers where these fellows advertise a planter, and they're going to larger ones so they try to sell their old tools out, right out. Cause they could buy the new machine cheaper that way. And this one planter in particular is one just like mine, equipped the same way with the exception of the monitor which I have; but it, the price, was $4500 which is a lot more than I paid for mine. But anyway this monitor system on the corn planter why, it tells exactly when there's corn going into each row of that planter. And in fact we have a counter on this planter that counts the seeds that it

plants in 15 seconds; and, of course, that's all calibrated on top of this monitor's main operating system. And you can tell exactly when, and -- how many kernels you are planting per acre. It's one of the most modern things in electronics; and for machinery, of course, they have modified it so they put it on combines and tell if a certain part of the combine is running and some parts are having trouble, but it's been a wonderful improvement on this particular planter. Of course, there's other companies they have plateless planters as they're so-called today. They operate different. I've never examined any closely; I've been well satisfied with mine. But there's one thing about it when you buy these planters, you like to know if they're workin' cause you've got a lot of money invested in them -- in fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides and so on. You have to be sure that you're getting from 20- to 25,000 kernels per acre which the counter will count out.

WESTERFIELD: In a sense it will let you know when you miss a row, so you won't waste your time.

WEBER: As soon as something plugs up, or one row isn't running, there's a horn that blows; and, of course, they also have flashing lights for these six rows and the light on that row will go out so you probably won't go 8- to 10 feet before you know that your planter is not operatin'. So you stop right away and you locate your trouble, so you can see where this monitor is very important.

WESTERFIELD: I suppose you'r not going to have much loss, like if you went through and missed a whole row you don't have to go back and do the whole thing over again; you miss 8 to 10 feet of it.

WEBER: Some of these planters when they first come out, I'm not sure if it's 4 or 5 years, I'll say 4 years ago -- Some of the fellows that got them in different counties, why they didn't have monitor systems on them and one fellow planted 55 acres with one row plugged up, /Laughter/ and of course, he was very dissappointed. I mean that made him mad. He didn't care for the planter. He poured a section of the corn bag, a piece from the bag--from the corn bag--went in there--and that's where that--

WESTERFIELD: Plugged up the hole?

WEBER: Yes. I've had some trouble the first year. I didn't have the monitor system on either, when I was planting soybeans; and, of course, we inoculate our soybeans when we have them cleaned, and occasionally you'll get a chunk of inoculation that will break loose and you won't see it, see, and it will go in the tube and plug it up. I think the most we ever had, I had to plant 7 acres over due to the fact that we tore all those beans out cause this is a plateless planter and it's different than a -- an ordinary plate planter. An ordinary plate planter you could take the boxes off the other five and just go in and plant that one row over see, but you can't shut any of these rows off on this cyclo planter.

WESTERFIELD: Another thing too, I know lately, I've been studying farms and I think there's been a trend from a smaller farm to a larger farm and getting a higher yield. What are your opinions on this?

WEBER: Well---going from a small farm or from a large farm to a small farm is, well, it just, people don't do it. I mean, it would be going backwards today.

WESTERFIELD: Well, I mean mainly, when a lot of them are starting-- like there's also been a trend I think. Mainly a lot of the farmers now are also employed part-time where back maybe 20 years ago farming was a full-time job.

WEBER: Yes.

WESTERFIELD: Where now I--guess the term they use is suitcase farming-- a lot of them, you know.

WEBER: Well, back here when these farms were all family farms, the farmer always had some livestock around; he had some pigs, or he had some cattle or else he was feeding a bunch of beef cattle. But today that trend is changing so that it's not prosperous to feed a bunch of -- a small bunch of cattle or milk a small bunch of cows. Today farming is like our industries in the city. They employ a lot of people and they have to do a large volume of business to come out with it. And that's the way farming is getting today. I know of a few getting away from the farm family---there is a few; in fact, there's only one small farm, what I would call a family farm, left in this area. And the man, he works an 80-acre farm; he

owns it; he milks cows; he makes a living off of that. He doesn't do any moonlighting of jobs or anything like that. He strictly makes a living off of this 80 acres.

WESTERFIELD: There's not many who do that anymore because there's almost, there's too much money involved in farming. Like machinery for example, I don't know, how many pieces of machinery do you have? You have various types I suppose.

WEBER: Well I have three tractors and one plow, and I have more or less just the necessary equipment to run a farm like this. I've got 700 acres that my son and I are going to be working this year. But there's farmers that have tractors for every job. I have a neighbor that has a tractor. It's pretty near a new tractor. It's about 12 years old and all it ever does is run the corn picker mounted on it, you see.

WESTERFIELD: It seems like a lot of money, extra wasted where you could save using one tractor.

WEBER: Anyway this farmer goes out and buys too much farm machinery. Well, it just isn't practical; I mean, he's got to regulate his acres that he's going to farm with the machinery. Don't go out when it isn't the prosperous thing to do, to just go out and buy a lot of machinery and hope that you can get those acres to work. What you can't do, because to rent more ground this year or the only way you're going to rent it is some men getting to the age of, retirement age of 65 years old, and deciding they've farmed long enough, and

that's almost the only way you can find a farm to rent. Unless somebody dies and then there's only about 20 guys after that farm.

WESTERFIELD: It's awful hard nowadays really (more or less) for a young person to get started.

WEBER: It is.

WESTERFIELD: It's so costly, he'd be in debt for so many years.

WEBER: Well, that's the only way a young fellow can get started farming---go out and borrow the money if he can get the acres to work. But he lives in debt for quite a few years, because it takes approximately from $70,000 to $100,000 involved in machinery to farm 400 to 500 acres. And if you're renting a farm today--- we used to be able to rent 160 acres that somebody else owned and we would work it, and you could make a livin' off of it, but that don't go today. Today you have got to have a large number of acres to work to make it a paying proposition.

WESTERFIELD: I know that lately there's been a trend also to higher yields in crops. Actually, what reason can you give me for this?

WEBER: Well, there's farmers that are getting higher yields. These seed corn companies are always experimenting and improving the seed; and, of course, a lot of the farmers are testing their soil, and when they find out that they're low on some

of the nutrients, why they'll go ahead and apply them and balance it all up, and providing mother nature gives us enough water, enough sunlight, they'll come up with a pretty good yield. Now as far as soybeans, there has been some enormous yields that I have read of in the paper that I've never been able to reach; my highest yield has been 51 bushels to the acre, and some of these magazines talk, or question different farmers where they have raised 80 to 90 bushels of beans. I've experimented different ways, different row width, fertilizing beans, and herbicides so they have absolutely no weeds but I just don't seem to be able to bring that soybean average yield up. It's, I would say that our average yield around here, around a normal year, if we can get moisture, will be around between 40 to 45 bushels. But I haven't been able to get up in that 80- and 90-bushel class, which I would like to be in. /laughter/ We do, I should say I do, some experimenting, maybe take a couple acres just for my own information, maybe throw on extra fertilizer even though the land didn't call for it, or extra nitrogen, it just don't seem to help. In fact, one year I was raising some wheat--well, we have some wheat this year, too; but this was about 12 years ago I had a field of wheat right behind our buildings here and I was putting nitrogen on in the spring and I, well, had some extra left over. This field in particular happened to have a slope toward the building, so I went up on the side hill there and I wrote our initials of my last name in nitrogen to see, and, oh, it worked wonderful. You could see the

name, but the only thing was that I put so much nitrogen on that I didn't get no wheat there. [Laughter]

WESTERFIELD: You seen the name showing up but you got no crop out of there? I know you were talking about this seed trend, too; I think lately they've been working a lot on resistance seeds, like for disease. Has there been any, do you remember anytime when a disease, a main disease, hit the corn or soybeans?

WEBER: I can't really say. We did back in '33 and '34. We had chinch bugs, which is an insect, but as far as disease, and the seed, well, the seed is treated. I have never, just don't recall any time that we have received a loss due to diseases. I mean now we have a-- like to follow the University of Illinois recommendations. I mean, after all we support that with taxes, and so they do the experimenting and a farmer should try to follow what they suggest. They have good entomogolists, some of the best, and also some of the best doctors on diseases in grain; they know. They can usually tell a year ahead, although they only have a small acreage where they're strictly experimenting. Maybe it'd only be, say corn, maybe four rows, oh, a hundred feet long. That probably will be a sample of acreage for testing, for disease, and they also test for yields, using different fertilizer, different amounts; and of course, now they have quite an experiment going on with the sludge which comes from the city of Chicago, from their sewage treatment plants. That is kind

of expensive to have done today because you have to put it on five to six inches deep to get enough out of it to do any good, I mean.

WESTERFIELD: I understand you were a graduate from our Joliet Junior College in our Agriculture Department. What was. . . ?

WEBER: Well, I, was not really a graduate. I went to junior college when I come home from the war. I was entitled to have schooling from, under the Bill of Rights, and I received two and one-half years of it. Anyway, then why this teacher that we had, decided to call it "A Young Farmer's Short Course." So he started having a ten-weeks' course in the winter, on one night a week which was Tuesday night. And they would always would have some speakers from different companies, different corn companies or chemical companies or something like that and sometimes we'd just have a meeting that we'd just kinda discuss our own situation, and we wouldn't have anybody in. The teacher would maybe ask us the questions, or maybe he wouldn't ask the questions, but it would be some of the other fellows who would ask the questions, but the crowd didn't hear it, and (Mr. Kuster was his name) he had a very good voice, so he would repeat the question so we always heard exactly what was going on.

WESTERFIELD: From what I understand, also I've heard down in the Agriculture Department that this is going on this year, too, and it's still Mr. Kuster who does it, so--- how long

has this short course program been going on, do you know?

WEBER: Well, it started in 1946 or '47, I don't remember.

WESTERFIELD: About twenty years then.

WEBER: About three years later is when they started this "Young Farmer's Short Course", and of course, all the young farmers have gotten to be old farmers, and they're still going to school.

WESTERFIELD: Still going to school! I imagine it's a thing you have to keep up--- it's a changing trend, a lot of changes.

WEBER: Well, that's where our changes come, I mean. Different fellows have tried different ideas like I've did some experiments and they've did some, and we kinda discuss this; and, of course, then we also usually have some agronomist from the University of Illinois give us some ideas on their experiments down there and it's valuable, it's fun. I mean there's some enjoyment. There's usually one meeting when we take our wives out to dinner, but after all, I mean it seems like every meeting you go to is educational. You may think that you didn't learn anything that particular night, but maybe a couple of weeks later you'll happen to think of that and you'll happen to remember that you learned that on that particular night.

WESTERFIELD: It may not get to you just right off the bat, but eventually the knowledge will hit you and say, "Gee, I'm glad I learned that, now I know what to do." But another

thing, I've learned of a process used in farming and that's crop rotation. Do you rotate your crops?

WEBER: Crop rotation is--- our crop rotation today is corn, beans and Florida. That might sound just a little bit unrealistic, but they plant corn and soybeans and they get it all done, harvested, and go to Florida the rest of the winter. /Laughter/ But back to the rotation of crops, then you'd have to go back here to when there was more horses around and people had more livestock and they would raise oats with clover in it, or alfalfa, some legume; and, of course, they had some livestock to feed those oats to. Today beings that there is no livestock around here, why there's nowheres to do with the oats, so there's no use raisin' them. They didn't pay, yield-wise or dollar-wise, per acre. They would'nt get enough money out of them per acre. That's what happened with--- to really be, I think, I wish we could get back where we could plant oats or barley or wheat, but still raise a little bit of wheat, I mean fifteen or twenty acres. It all depends on how much we can get in the fall. The only place we have to put wheat in the fall is if we can get some beans combined early enough, say before the 10th of October. Then we've got a chance we can put some beans, we can take a chance on it, if that wheat will get up a little bit, why we definitely know we're going to have a crop. Now it isn't like some of the places down in the southwest. I was on a vacation this year and visited a friend of mine. He had 700 acres of wheat in Texas, the Panhandle of Texas is what this was; and, gee,

the ground was as dry as dry could be. And the winds were startin' to come up and they'd just blow the wheat right out of the ground, and what they didn't blow out of the ground, why they'd blow more soil on top of it. That's what's happening now.

WESTERFIELD: Another thing, too, that's come up lately, I imagine, is the fact that there's been a trend lately in the conservation of the soil. Has the goverment been working with you in this project or anything?

WEBER: Yes, the government has worked, one time, I mean, that's the only time that I had asked. I keep---we're on a sort of a rolling farm that we have here, and we have waterways, and this one particular waterway, why it just didn't suit me the way it would kind of zigzag down through the field, so I went to the Conservation Office and explained, and the man came out and showed me. I don't remember his name anymore, but he came out and showed me how to re-design the waterway, so I had to hire a man with a grader and an earthmover and they straightened my waterway out; and of course, I seeded it down and it has worked very well, up until last spring. This waterway in particular was made about fifteen years ago, longer, maybe twenty years ago. But last year we had a terrific amount of rain in the spring there and it would get to washing so bad in this waterway, I had a real thick stand of brome grass in there. And, of course, the water couldn't get down through there, so it would run off the sides and we had ditches down

on both sides of the waterway. So I'm still undecided. I haven't done anything about it yet, I might have to get that rebuilt again. But you can conserve the soil by using waterways. As far as bean fields, we never, we don't touch a bean field in the fall. We harvest the soybeans and we leave the straw lay right there. We don't disk it, see, so that helps control washing, and,but corn-- ground stalks, we plow. Another thing, that's another thing against these working large acreages, we can't wait and do our plowing in the spring because we have too many acres to plow. So we are causing our own soil erosion, wind erosion, due to the fact that I said we have to get as much of our work done as we possibly can in the fall.

WESTERFIELD: I know you were talking there about you didn't plow your beans fields or that. Do you have any acreage which you put in this new process? I guess it's not a new process, but it's a process called minimum tillage or no tillage.

WEBER: Well, yes, our soybeans are sort of a minimum tillage. I said we don't work the ground in the fall at all. Well, then in the coming spring, why all we do is disk the ground as early as we can, kind of mostly to level the field off--that operation--and then we'll probably disk it or use a field cultivator just ahead of the corn planter. So actually that's minimum tillage. Of course, that is not; now there's still some people that go out and plant and don't work the soil at

all. They have a planter and plant right in those rows and everything, but--- well, I kind of like to have these fields leveled off, I mean. Our harvesting machinery works better that way.

WESTERFIELD: Do you have any problems with land features, like rocks or this, in your fields?

WEBER: Yes. We have these farms we work, this one my brother and I own, I live in here. We have a lot of rocks on this farm. We pick them up. Just because we have rocks, that don't mean that we have a lot of gravel on our farm or anything; it's just rocks or clay, so we usually pick them up every year as any rock that is say over 3, over 4 inches in diameter we'll pick that up. I mean, and, well, if you pick every year, you kind of stay ahead of them. Sometimes you're getting bigger ones, and another thing that's happening too is we've got a lot of power on these plows and we have a tendency to plow deeper in the fall. If we can get more ground mixed up to help get our ground deeper, loosened down deeper, what it amounts to is these plows have a tendency to pull out bigger rocks. Sometimes on some of the farms that we rent, why they're bigger than we can handle. We have to take a tractor with an end loader on it to carry them out of the field.

WESTERFIELD: Yeah, otherwise that would be a problem if you had a big one, or if it would get in your combine, it would probably wreck the mechanism.

WEBER: Yeah, that's right. We, I say we always picked them

up. By the time we planted the crop and cultivated it maybe twice, why you'll have some more bigger rocks say, 7 or 8 inches in diameter; and, but you didn't see it cause today we use cultivators on the rear of the tractor instead of the front, so the only thing you do, you sit that tractor at a straight line and try to drive that and have your cultivator set a little wider than you would if you had a front-mount cultivator on and so you really don't know what's going on in back of you, except once in a while you turn around and look and see if it's not plugged up or something like that, and anyway those rocks then why occasionally we get them in the combines and sometimes the damage is terrific. But if you can see the rock go in, we have what we call electric clutches on it. We kick the clutch and stop that, the front end of that machine, right off the bat; or if we don't do it that way why, we can do it by trying to turn the switch off and jam the brakes on. That stops the whole machine. That's just a bit reckless way to handle machinery, but sometimes that won't do near as much damage as if a hard, a real hard rock goes into it.

WESTERFIELD: I see another thing too, I don't know if there's really any specific reason or not, but the fact that tractors lately, I remember way back when I used to see them out there, there used to be the two front wheels on the front right underneath the tractor.

WEBER: Tricycle.

WESTERFIELD: Where now they're more widespread. Is there any specific reason for this?

WEBER: They used wide front ends, well, naturally they used to have this what they call the tricycle landing, or tricycle wheel, two little wheels close together. When we used to have front cultivators, I mean you could get into the cultivator easier see, but now the machinery companies are coming out more with rear-mount cultivators, and so you have a wide front end on the tractor; it's easier to stabilize the tractor and they're easier to steer, too. But when you have a tricycle tractor and you have a cultivator going down the road and those little front wheels they get to wobbling after the tractor gets wore a little bit and they're not as stable as the regular wide front end.

WESTERFIELD: Yeah. I know there has been quite a change, really. Seems like there's been more farm equipment companies have come up lately. There's been, like you say, there seems like an increase in the manufacturing of actual equipment. Is there, I mean does it seem to you like there are many more farms increasing though?

WEBER: Well, no, there isn't any more farms available. Though they have in some parts of the country, not in this part. They have bought some land that has been virgin, what they call virgin soil; but today it looks like a lot of machinery, well, farmers they invest in machinery. It helps them cause they get a depreciation account on this machinery and it helps reduce their income taxes. And, well, there's farmers working bigger farms; and, well, they see a new machine and decide that will

help them some more so they go and buy that machine. And maybe they'll have good tools in their shed that they won't pull out for years until they have a sale or something. I mean that's kind of like these farm sales today where men, they're in the age of retiring, why they start getting ready for a sale and they start bringing out some of this old stuff that they have; and if it's thirty years or older, why they call it antiques. They get more money for them and maybe 3 times as much or 4 times as much as they paid for it. It'll be the same way with this machinery today. I mean they buy more machinery. The farmers think that'll make it a little easier to do the work and quicker. They can spend more time in front of that television and stuff, you know; and, well, pretty soon they ain't got no room for it, so they call this man around that builds these tool sheds, these buildings. Well, so they make a sale; they put up a big building. Well, then the farmer's got lots of room to put his tools in but he'll be buying more and pretty soon that tool shed is too small. So they have to build another one.

WESTERFIELD: I know this year, that I've noticed at the show that it seems like there's more tractors being --- coming in. They were from both Germany and Russia. Also what are your feelings about this, these tractors from outside?

WEBER: Yes, there's other tractors coming in, different makes coming from different countries. They seem to be more economical than the American-made tractor. They aren't quite

as big; but, well, the fellows that have them seem to like them. My personal feelings is that I don't really care about them too much cause I feel that we live in a free country and we should use tools that are made in this country. But these other countries why, they're sending their tractors; they're also making a lot of automobiles coming to this country. Well, I could go on and on on that subject, but I'd just as soon not do it.

WESTERFIELD: Well, thank you Mr. Weber for letting me come here and interview you. Like I say I'll be back with the typed up manuscript, O. K.?

INDEX

Agriculture Department, 25
agronomist, 26
ammunitions plant,6
Army, 6

beef. 14
Bill of Rights, 25
brome grass, 28
brother, 5-6,8-9,12-13,16,30
butcher, 14

calves, 5
cemetery, 7
Chicago, 24
Chicago District Pipeline, 14
chinch bugs, 13,24
chores, 6,8
Coca Cola plant, 15
combine, 10, 11,18,30,31
conservation, 28
Conservation Office, 28
corn planter, 10,16-19,30
cows, 5,6,8,20
crops,8,10-14,22-24,27,29,31
custodian, 7
cultivators, 30-32
cyclo-planter, 17-19

depreciation, 32
disease, 24
drought years, 13

equipment, 10,21
erosion, 13
entomologist, 24

farm, farming, 5-10, 13,15,20
family, 9
fertilizers, 12, 23
Florida, 27

garden, 14
Germany, 7, 33
government, 11-12, 28
grandparents, 6,7,14

herbicides, 13,23
heart attacks, 9
horses, 7, 27
hospitals, 16
hybrid seeds, 12

inflation, 9, 14
inoculation, 19
International Harvester Company, 17

Joliet, IL, 9, 15
Joliet Junior College, 25

Kuster, Mr. Max, 25

marriage, 9
milking, 5-6, 8
minimum tillage, 29
monitors, 16

nitrogen, 23

Panhandle of Texas, 27
parents, 5-6, 12, 14-15
pigs, 14, 20
phosphate, raw rock, 9
phosphorus, 9

renting, 10
rocks, 30-31
Route 30, 15
Russia, 33

tenent farming, 9
Texas, 27
Theodore Street, 15
tool sheds, 33
tractors, 9-10,21,30-34
truck, 6-8
uncle, 5,7
University of IL, 24,26

waterways, 28
weather, 13
Weber Road, 14
wheat, 11
Will County, 17
World War II, 6, 25

yield(s),12,20, 22-23
Young Farmer's Short Course,25-26